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A-ONE #1343   10/28/11

~ Happy 10th XP, Goodbye! ~ People Are Talking!   ~ AmigaOne X1000 Soon!
~ UN Panel To Help Poor! ~ Google+ Photo Editing! ~ John McCarthy Dies!
~ Duqu Server Shut Down! ~ Cover Browsing Tracks! ~ HP Staying With PCs!

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     ~ 15 Years, Little Change ~ Barrage of Blockbusters ~ PS Vita Bundle!

                   -* Japan Is Caught Flat-footed! *-
                 -* China Police Detain Internet Users! *-
               -* Feds To Monitor Google Privacy Practices!  *-




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->From the Editor's Keyboard              "Saying it like it is!"
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Okay, so apparently Mother Nature is playing an early "Trick 'o' Treat"
trick on us here in New England!  It's not even Halloween yet and we've
had snow, with an early major storm predicted for the weekend.  Heck, the
leaves on my trees have just started to turn color and fall this week!
I am definitely not ready for this stuff yet!  Hopefully I won't end up in
a situation like I did a few years ago and have a lot of snow on the
ground before my leaves fall; they'll end up waiting to be cleaned up in
the Spring!

So, while we prepare for an early fall Nor'easter, we wish you all a safe
and hair-raising Halloween holiday.  Remember to drive safely that night
and watch out for all of those little ghosts and goblins on the streets.
And, after that, remember that it's Daylight Savings time this weekend;
enjoy that extra hour of sleep!

Until next time...



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->In This Week's Gaming Section  - PS Vita Bundle Offers Early Access!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""    Barrage of Blockbusters!



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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   -  The Latest Gaming News!
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PlayStation Vita First Edition Bundle Offers Early Access... For A Price


For those who think an extra $50 is a small price to pay for the right to
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own a PlayStation Vita a week ahead of the common people, Sony has a deal for you.

Announced this week on the official PlayStation Blog, the PlayStation Vita First Edition Bundle puts the handheld system in gamers hands February 15 - a full seven days before everyone else. (Everyone who didn t also pre-order it, that is.)

However, the ability to show off the Vita s array of bells, whistles, and fancy sensors comes with a price, folks.

For consumers here in North America, the First Edition Bundle will cost $350 for the 3G + Wi-Fi model, a case, a 4GB memory card, and a copy of Little Deviants (a mini-game that shows off the Vita s abilities) - which amounts to $50 more than the same package will cost on February 22. The non-3G Vita will also get a First Edition Bundle, but it will only be available in Canada and will cost $300 - a price tag that also adds $50 to the standard retail price.

The PlayStation Vita First Edition Bundle goes on sale today at 'select' retailers.

Video Game Makers Prepare Barrage of Blockbusters

Video game makers are breaking out the big guns and hitting players with a barrage of dynamite titles that will compete for their devotion and entertainment dollars this holiday season.

Bethesda Softwork's freshly released "Rage" blends brilliant graphics with fast-paced combat on foot and in vehicles in an expansive vision of an Earth rendered wasteland by an asteroid strike.

"Resistance 3," crafted by Insomniac Studios exclusively for Sony PlayStation 3, builds on the shooter franchise's notorious arsenals to arm players in a fierce last-ditch quest to save humanity from alien invaders.

"Battlefield 3" launched Tuesday, getting a head start on eagerly-awaited shooter rival "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3," which hits the market in early November.

Those who prefer to duel with their wits can play the famed Dark Knight from comic book lore in "Batman: Arkham City," a sequel that arrived this month to rave reviews.

Electronic Arts has meanwhile added a new pet-themed version to its cult hit Sims videogame franchise.

"This is the most crowded release schedule I've ever seen," video game industry analyst Michael Pachter, of Wedbush Morgan Securities, told AFP on Wednesday.

"They are all going to make money," he predicted. "And this is the season to make money."

The year is finishing out with a barrage of of must-have titles. Video game makers are also enticing customers by adapting to the new

motion-sensing capabilities of Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 consoles.

Pachter expected it to be a lucrative season, with the earliest titles to hit the market grabbing the largest share.

"It is like going to a smorgasbord, and by the time you get to the dessert your plate is full," Pachter said.

"Everything is so good that people are going to fill up their plates by the time those later games get there... Those out first are the winners and the losers are the guys who come out last; it is not a quality issue."

"Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception," an action-adventure title set for release on November 1, features breathtaking graphics and is seen as a sure contender for video game of the year.

"Modern Warfare 3" meanwhile promises to "such the air out of gamers' lungs" when the title becomes available to zealous fans of the military shooter franchise a week later, according to Pachter.

That could leave players' wallets light by the time French video game titan Ubisoft releases the next installment in its "Assassin's Creed" franchise in mid-November.

"Saints Row: The Third" and "Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3" are due to hit the market at about the same time.

Car racing game "Need for Speed" and Bethesda's epic fantasy game "The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim" will also come out in November.

"They are all going to be good," Pachter said, predicting that lackluster packaged video game sales would get a boost over the holidays and downplaying the impact of free online games, like those offered on social networks.

Blockbuster titles typically debut with prices in the $40 to $60 range.

But Pachter likened big console videogames to the major Hollywood success "Avatar" and free online games, like those from startup Zynga, to hit television programs such as "American Idol."

"They are both televised entertainment, but they don't compete," he said. "There is not a person alive who said they couldn't watch 'Avatar' because they watched 'American Idol' instead."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Feds To Monitor Google s Privacy Practices For Next 20 Years

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission on Monday finalized a landmark settlement with Google in which the company has agreed to be audited for its privacy practices for the next 20 years.

The commission has said that this is the first time that it has required any company to formally implement a comprehensive privacy program to protect individuals personal information.

The FTC commissioners voted to approve the settlement 4-0, after the period for public comment ended. The proposed settlement was announced in March.

The FTC case was prompted by the now-defunct Google Buzz social networking service. Google tried to tack Buzz onto Gmail users e-mail accounts, enabling them to provide status updates and to share photos and videos, but it created an uproar when it made users Gmail contacts public by default.

The commission charged that Google engaged in unfair and deceptive practices in 2010 when it launched Google Buzz by leading users of its Gmail system to believe that they could easily opt-out of the social network. The controls that would enable them to do that were ineffective, the FTC charged at the time.

Also the tools that Google created to enable users to limit the sharing of users personal information were confusing and difficult to find, the agency alleged.

In its complaint, the FTC said that Google had enrolled some Gmail users in Google Buzz even after the users had clicked on a tab to decline to use the service, and that the identities of people that Gmail account holders most frequently communicated with were made public by default. Worse, when users tried to get out of the service, they weren t fully removed.

In a press statement on the settlement, the FTC noted, "In response to the Buzz launch, Google received thousands of complaints from consumers who were concerned about public disclosure of their email contacts which included, in some cases, ex-spouses, patients, students, employers, or competitors."

Google made changes to respond to those complaints, but the FTC went after the company because Google had violated its own privacy policy by using its users personal information in a way that they had not consented to even though Google had said they would ask for permission first.

The commission had also charged that the way that Google had gone about representing the way its users personal information would be displayed was deceptive. Users didn t know, for example, that their most frequently e-mailed contacts would be made public by default.

The FTC s settlement with Google requires the company to inform and obtain its users consent before it shares any of their information with third parties, and subjects the company to 20 years of privacy audits every two years by an independent third party monitoring service. The audits are meant to ensure that Google is living up to its promises about what it is doing with its users personal information. The company is also required to implement a comprehensive ‘privacy program.’

Google recently killed its disastrous Google Buzz project, which had been long abandoned in favor of its Google+ social network, which has met with

general praise for the way it enables users to control how they share information on a fine-grained level.

In an e-mail to TPM, Google s Senior Manager of Global Communications Chris Gaither said that Google has completely revamped the way it approaches privacy.

"We ve strengthened many of our internal privacy and security controls over the past year," he said. "For example, in October we appointed longtime Google engineer Alma Whitten to director of privacy across product management and engineering."

In addition, Gaither says, "We ve increased privacy training for all our employees. We ve tightened our compliance controls for those who deal with sensitive data. And last fall, we added a new process to our existing privacy review system requiring every engineering project leader to maintain a Privacy Design Document for each initiative they are working on. This document records how user data is handled and is subject to regular review."

Like other technology companies, Google had come increasing fire both here in the United States and especially in Europe over privacy issues.

Last May, Google inadvertently collected data from private WiFi networks when its Street View cars drove by. Google has since been investigated by the regulatory authorities in Europe over the incident.

Cyber Attacks Caught Japan Flat Footed, Experts Say

Japan was likely caught flat-footed by a recent spate of cyber attacks against the heart of its government and defense industry, experts said, warning that the country's credibility and diplomatic relations could suffer unless prompt countermeasures were put in place.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura said on Wednesday that the foreign ministry and some Japanese embassies had come under attack since June. Earlier on Tuesday Asahi newspaper reported that hackers have targeted computer networks at Japan's lower house of parliament since July.

The hackings follow an attack on Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd, Japan's biggest defense contractor.

In response, the government on Tuesday brought forward the launch, originally planned for next year, of a framework that will share information on cyber attacks and discuss defenses among private and public sector participants, including the trade ministry. A trade ministry official, however, told Reuters that the framework would not have the authority to prescribe official steps against cyber attacks.

"Government reaction to these attacks seem slow. Their response needs to be better managed. They also need technological improvements," said Makoto Miyoshi, president of I.S. Rating, a company that rates information security.

One problem could be multitude of government bodies that deal with cyber security. Those include the trade ministry, the police and military, and the National Information Security Center (NISC), which is under the

Cabinet Secretariat.

"The way cyber security is conducted in Japan needs an overhaul. For example one body, like NISC, may need be allowed to make crucial decisions. Otherwise Japan will always remain on the back foot," said Miyoshi.

"Attacks on government institutions hurt Japan's international credibility. Japan also risks straining ties with the United States if it can't protect military information."

Experts said expertise and technology from the private sector would be crucial if the government wanted to shore up its defenses in the cyber world.

"The government has not shown much initiative so far and judging from their past inability to deal with social change it will try to deal each attack with stop gap measures," said Itsuro Nishimoto, a chief technical officer at cyber security company LAC.

"It cannot go it alone, and it could use information provided by the private sector to prevent attacks preemptively."

Nishimoto, who described the recent attacks as a new form of international espionage, added: "If Japan wants to seriously counter these cyber attacks, it will have to go on the offensive and strike at the base of the attacks. It then has to be prepared to disclose to the world where the attacks are coming from."

Asahi said that an attack on a parliament member's computer infected by an intruding virus was linked to servers in China, though it was hard to tell who placed the program there. Japanese official, however, did not point at any destination as source of the attacks.

China Police Detain Internet Users

Chinese police have begun to detain and punish people for spreading rumours online, the government said on Tuesday, as authorities intensify efforts to censor content on the Internet.

A university student in southwest China's Yunnan province was detained for disseminating fake information on a local murder, the State Internet Information Office said, while a man in Shanghai was taken into custody for 15 days for posting falsified tax documents online.

Police were also seeking the whereabouts of those responsible for posting false information found on three popular websites, the newly established office said in statement on government websites.

It did not detail what kind of information had been posted.

The moves come after Chinese authorities had vowed to crackdown on rumours and false information on the Internet.

China - which has the world's largest online population with more than half a billion users - constantly strives to control the Internet, blocking content it deems politically sensitive as part of a vast censorship system.

But the rise of China's weibos - microblogs similar to Twitter, which is banned by the communist authorities - has exposed the difficulty of controlling access to information.

Meanwhile more and more Chinese are turning to weibos to vent their anger over government corruption, scandals and disasters in a country where authorities maintain a tight grip on the media.

Tuesday's statement said that in the latest crackdown an editor at an Internet website had been warned for publishing a microblog entry concerning the recent crash of an air force fighter jet "without confirming the source and facts."

"Authorities will step up efforts to stop rumors and punish individuals and websites spreading rumors," the statement said.

India Shuts Server Linked to Duqu Computer Virus

Indian authorities seized computer equipment from a data center in Mumbai as part of an investigation into the Duqu malicious software that some security experts warned could be the next big cyber threat.

Two workers at a web-hosting company called Web Werks told Reuters that officials from India's Department of Information Technology last week took several hard drives and other components from a server that security firm Symantec Corp told them was communicating with computers infected with Duqu.

News of Duqu first surfaced last week when Symantec said it had found a mysterious computer virus that contained code similar to Stuxnet, a piece of malware believed to have wreaked havoc on Iran's nuclear program.

Government and private investigators around the world are racing to unlock the secret of Duqu, with early analysis suggesting that it was developed by sophisticated hackers to help lay the groundwork for attacks on critical infrastructure such as power plants, oil refineries and pipelines.

The equipment seized from Web Werks, a privately held company in Mumbai with about 200 employees, might hold valuable data to help investigators determine who built Duqu and how it can be used. But putting the pieces together is a long and difficult process, experts said.

"This one is challenging," said Marty Edwards, director of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Industrial Control Systems Cyber Emergency Response Team. "It's a very complex piece of software."

He declined to comment on the investigation by authorities in India, but said that his agency was working with counterparts in other countries to learn more about Duqu.

Two employees at Web Werks said officials from India's Department of Information Technology came to their office last week to take hard drives and other parts from a server.

They said they did not know how the malware got on to Web Werks' server.

"We couldn't track down this customer," said one of the two employees, who did not want to be identified for fear of losing their jobs.

An official in India's Department of Information Technology who investigates cyber attacks also declined to discuss the matter. "I am not able to comment on any investigations," said Gulshan Rai, director of the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, or CERT-In.

Stuxnet is malicious software designed to target widely used industrial control systems built by Germany's Siemens. It is believed to have crippled centrifuges that Iran uses to enrich uranium for what the United States and some European nations have charged is a covert nuclear weapons program.

Duqu appears to be more narrowly targeted than Stuxnet as researchers estimate the new trojan virus has infected at most dozens of machines so far. By comparison, Stuxnet spread much more quickly, popping up on thousands of computer systems.

Security firms including Dell Inc's SecureWorks, Intel Corp's McAfee, Kaspersky Lab and Symantec say they found Duqu victims in Europe, Iran, Sudan and the United States. They declined to provide their identities.

Duqu - so named because it creates files with "DQ" in the prefix - was designed to steal secrets from the computers it infects, researchers said, such as design documents from makers of highly sophisticated valves, motors, pipes and switches.

Experts suspect that information is being gathered for use in developing future cyber weapons that would target the control systems of critical infrastructure.

The hackers behind Duqu are unknown, but their sophistication suggests they are backed by a government, researchers say.

"A cyber saboteur should understand the engineering specifications of every component that could be targeted for destruction in an operation," said John Bumgarner, chief technology officer for the U.S. Cyber Consequences Unit.

That is exactly what the authors of Stuxnet did when they built that cyber weapon, said Bumgarner, who is writing a paper on the development of Stuxnet.

"They studied the technical details of gas centrifuges and figured out how they could be destroyed," he said.

Such cyber reconnaissance missions are examples of an increasingly common phenomenon known as "blended" attacks, where elite hackers infiltrate one target to facilitate access to another.

Hackers who infiltrated Nasdaq's computer systems last year installed malware that allowed them to spy on the directors of publicly held companies.

In March, hackers stole digital security keys from EMC Corp's RSA Security division that they later used to breach the networks of defense contractor Lockheed Martin Corp.

Researchers said they are still trying to figure out what the next phase of Duqu attacks might be.

"We are a little bit behind in the game," said Don Jackson, a director of the Dell SecureWorks Counter Threat Unit. "Knowing what these guys are doing, they are probably a step ahead."

UN Panel Sets Target To Connect Poor to Broadband

A United Nations panel has given governments a target of connecting half the world's poor citizens to broadband Internet by 2015.

The U.N.'s Broadband Commission for Digital Development also says at least 40 percent of households in developing countries should be hooked up to broadband within four years.

The panel representing industry, academia and governments issued the challenge Tuesday. It said broadband access needs to be affordable even in the most impoverished nations.

The head of the U.N.'s International Telecommunications Union in Geneva, Hamadoun Toure, says the targets are "ambitious but achievable" if governments work together with the private sector.

How To Cover Your Web Browsing Tracks

We're all familiar with the sinking feeling you get when the power goes out and the computer fails to save something you've been working on. What we don't often consider is that there's a lot of stuff computers hang onto that we probably would be happier to see deleted as soon as possible - especially when it comes to sharing a computer. Not everyone has the luxury of having a system of their own. If you haven't set up individual user accounts for everyone who shares your computer, someone inquisitive might get curious about where you've been surfing.

Give your internet browser instant amnesia with these quick tricks. A lot of these tactics make surfing faster and safer, too.

Back in the bad old days of dial-up internet, web browsers tried to be helpful and speed up browsing by downloading and storing a cached copy of the web pages we visited, since calling up that information from our hard drives was a lot faster than downloading it every time we went to one of our favorite sites. Now, with the widespread availability of fast internet connections, this cache of temporary internet files is more like our browsing software's appendix than a must-have feature.

Deleting these files when your browser closes, rather than letting them hang around, is definitely a good idea if you don't want your computer - and anyone who happens to sit down at it - to know where you've been. Internet Explorer lets you do this automatically when the browser exits; Firefox, Safari, and Chrome all require you to delete these files by hand (though there are extensions for both Chrome and Firefox that let you automate the process).

So, we've dumped out the temporary files that your computer has downloaded - but that's only part of the solution. Your browser still remembers what

pages you've been to (called the browsing history), a convenience that allows your browser to populate the address bar after you've only typed a few letters of the web address. However, by clicking the down arrow at the edge of the address bar, anyone can see at a glance a whole bunch of recent web destinations that browser has been to. Not exactly the way to keep a low profile if you're doing some holiday shopping or job hunting on company time, to say the least.

Deleting your history purges this information from your browser's memory (since it persists from one browsing session to the next, even if you purge your temp files).

Cookies, those tiny text files that let web pages know you've visited them before, are the third part of the equation. Their entire reason for being is to identify you and track your web habits when it comes to being a regular at a website, whether it's Amazon or Facebook or Gmail. Tossing your cookies will allow you to visit websites as if you'd never been there before. Anyone snooping on your computer after you've cleared the cookies away won't see their telltale leavings, even if the cookies themselves don't contain anything but site addresses and the dates and times of your last visit.

Finally, there's the matter of web browsers storing usernames, passwords, and other form data for sites you visit that require a username to log in. This information is a time-saver when you've got a million passwords to remember, but it can also be an Achilles' heel if you're trying to be stealthy about your web travels.

If someone else sits down at your computer to check email on the same webmail service you use, it's far too easy for browsers to auto-fill the login fields with your username (and maybe even a password), so this is something you may want to scrub from time to time, too. After all, it's one thing for somebody to glance at your web history and something else altogether if up comes your email inbox!

All of the current crop of internet browsers include a feature that lets you in effect surf off the record. The programs themselves will empty the cache and delete the browsing history when you finish; they won't load any add-ons, and they'll ignore website requests to store cookies.

No matter which of the major browsers you use, visit the Tools menu (or select the gear- or wrench-shaped icon that serves the same purpose) to choose to start a Teflon-coated browsing session, usually in a new window. The upside of explicitly opening a private browsing window is that it doesn't inconvenience you by deleting your history, cookies, and any stored logins you normally use, while still cloaking what you do in that window from prying eyes.

There are plenty of reasons why you might want to use private, no-traces-left-behind surfing sessions, like planning a surprise getaway for you and your partner or keeping tech-savvy youngsters from knowing where you've been shopping for their birthday present.

HP Is Staying in the PC Business

Hewlett-Packard, the world's largest tech company, decided to keep its PC business after calculating that spinning it off would cost $1.5 billion.

Reuters reports:

The California company has been struggling in the PC market - a low-margin but high revenue business - as niftier gadgets such as Apple Inc's iPad have lured consumers away.

Citing deep integration of the PC group in HP's supply chain and procurement, recently appointed Chief Executive Meg Whitman said the company was "stronger" with the unit.

HP announced in August that it was thinking of dropping its PC business, shocking tech news watchers. That news came as the company officially shed a lot of its other consumer-side products. At the time, MG Siegler at TechCrunch tweeted, "What exactly does HP do now? Just sell printer ink?"

AmigaOne X1000 To Ship by Year's End; Amiga Netbook Announced

Big news from the Amiga world this weekend. That stubborn bunch are holding AmiWest 2011 this weekend, and it's been one heck of an eventful little, uh, event. Not only will the AmigaOne X1000 start shipping by year's end, Hyperion also announced something many in the Amiga world have been waiting for for a long time: an Amiga laptop. Update: Steven Solie, AmigaOS' team lead, also held a presentation about the past, present, and future of AmigaOS. The team is working on some pretty interesting stuff - protected address space, multicore support, USB3, new printing subsystem, and much more.

It's been a long and sock-filled journey, but the exciting and unique AmigaOne X1000 is nearing completion. AmiKit, one of the main distributors of Amiga computers and related materials, is already taking pre-orders, with the computers expecting to ship around Christmas. Thanks to its use of the rare P.A. Semi PowerPC processor, the X1000 is the only computer to ship with an Apple processor that isn't a Mac or iOS device.

The full list of specifications:

    Dual-core 1.8GHz PowerISA v2.04+ CPU.
    "Xena" 500MHz XMOS XS1-L1 128 SDS.
    ATI Radeon R700 graphics card.
    2GB RAM.
    500GB Hard drive.
    22x DVD combo drive.
    Customised case, keyboard and mouse.
    7.1 channel HD audio.
    Ports and connectors:
        4x DDR2 RAM slots.
        10x USB 2.0.
        1x Gigabit Ethernet.
        2x PCIe x16 slots (1x16 or 2x8).
        2x PCIe x1 slots.
        1x Xorro slot.
        2x PCI legacy slots.
        2x RS232.
        4x SATA 2 connectors.
        1x IDE connector.
        JTAG connector.
        1x Compact Flash.

Before we get to the price, bear in mind that this computer was not designed to be competitive on price or even features. Basically, the X1000 was designed to be the best and fastest Amiga computer possible, with little regarded for keeping costs down. This machine is not for average, every-day users – this is for the Amiga connoisseur. And being a connoisseur comes at a price. A hefty price.

"The 'First Contact' system includes the official AmigaOne X1000 'Boing Ball' case in either black or white and includes the Nemo rev 2.1 motherboard complete with 1GB of DDR2 RAM, a Radeon HD4650 graphics card, 500GB HDD, DVR R/W optical drive, Audio & Ethernet cards. Prices start from £1699 (excluding AmigaOS4 license, shipping, handling and sales tax)," the AmigaKit press release states, "Optional extras include the 'Boing Ball' keyboard & mouse, Ram, HDD & Optical drive upgrade options plus Debian Squeeze pre-installed in a dual booting configuration with AmigaOS4."

That's quite the price right there, especially since this listed price doesn't include the AmigaOS4 license just yet. Then again, as said, you can't expect a system with such exotic hardware to be cheap, and I doubt those that have expressed interest in this machine will care too much about the price tag – much in the same way that Bethesda could ask ˙150 for Skyrim and I'd still buy it without a shred of doubt.

Good news, then, that something else lies on the horizon, something Amiga fans have been asking and hoping for for a long time now. Yes, At AmiWest, Hyperion, the company that develops AmigaOS, has announced a PowerPC netbook which is already running AmigaOS4. Sticker shock won't be an issue here – the netbook will cost between $300 and $500 (which includes AmigaOS4), which would make this the perfect entry-level Amiga machine. If they manage to hit the $300 price point, I'm pretty sure they'd be able to push quite a few of these (relative to the more expensive X1000 and various sam440-based Amigas).

So, what can we expect from this machine? Well, it's 'sourced in a special configuration from an OEM'. Current prototypes have an integrated graphics chip, 512 MB of RAM, a few gigabytes of storage, the usual array of USB/audio/ethernet ports, and a wireless chip. AmigaOS4 is already running on it, but in an early state. It is expected to be released somewhere in mid-2012.

This is very exciting news. If you has asked me only a few years ago if any alternative operating system with special hardware requirements could survive, you'd get a clear and duh-like 'no' – and yet, here we are, with the X1000 right around the corner, the AmigaOne 500 by Acube, and now an Amiga netbook on the horizon.

Exciting times indeed. I'm happy there are real Amigans working on real Amigas, instead of people just slapping a logo on an Atom box and charging ˙1200 for the privilege to run Ubuntu on an outdated machine. Can you imagine people doing the latter? My, that would be just silly!

Google+ Gets New Photo Editing Tools in Time for Halloween

Google has added a built-in photo editing Creative Kit to its burgeoning social network Google+ and is encouraging its users to try out the new

features with a Halloween-themed photo competition.

The new set of editing tools adds support for Instagram-like vintage filters (found under the 'Effects' tab), text editing and basic photo manipulation tools such as sharpen, crop, rotate, exposure and resize.

"Of course: we also think photo editing should be lots of fun. So we ve added some limited-edition Halloween effects to the Creative Kit, and we re inviting everyone on Google+ to join a ghoulish (and good-spirited) photo competition," said Vic Gundotra, Senior Vice President of Engineering at Google.

"If you want to make your own Halloween picture (or just have fun embellishing them) try the new photo editing tool in G+. Just click "Edit" when viewing any of your photos, then 'Creative Kit'. Dead simple..." explained Google Senior Vice President of Operations Urs Hoelzle in a Google+ post.

If Google+ is not your thing, there is a myriad of free photo editors to be found online including Photoshop, Aviary, Dr.pic, FotoFlexer, LoonaPix and (Google's recent acquisition) Picknik.

To submit your Halloween picture into the competition simply share it publicly on Google+ along with the hashtag #gplushalloween before November 3.

Happy 10th Birthday, Windows XP! And Goodbye

Suppose on your birthday, your parents were firm in saying that, within a few years, they didn't want anything to do with you. Now you know how Windows XP feels.

On Tuesday, the venerable workhorse of operating systems turned a ripe 10 years old. Introduced in 2001, it was an advancement over its older brother, Windows 2000. Key among its improvements were a streamlined, task-based interface that allowed users to find their apps and files more quickly through the taskbar or Start Menu.

Other enhancements included improved power management, a faster boot, and a reputation for being stable.

But Microsoft is eager to move users to Windows 7, and the company has once again confirmed that they will end all remaining support for XP by April 2014.

"We are end-of-lifing XP and Office 2003 and everything prior" at that time, Microsoft Chief Operating Officer Kevin Turner told a financial analysts meeting last month, a position the company reaffirmed this week.

He added that, for the businesses that haven't upgraded, "XP has been a wonderful product," but now it's "time for it to go." The 2014 date, actually, is an extension on the death sentence, since Microsoft normally ends OS support ten years after launch.

The last PCs with XP pre-installed were sold in October of last year, and the end of software sales of the OS was in 2008.

In a post on the official Windows Experience Blog, Kristina Libby asked readers to "think about hair - are you still rocking the same cut" as 10 years ago? Since most readers would reply in the negative - assuming they can remember their haircut from 10 years ago - Libby asked, "Why then are you still on Windows XP when Windows 7 is so much better?"

The blog post includes an illustrated infographic, titled, "Standing still is falling behind." It lists a variety of popular items from 10 years ago, and compares them with ones today - most notably, XP vs. Windows 7.

But the move toward 7 has been slower than the company would have liked, with only an estimated 25 percent of all enterprises that use Windows using Windows 7. Microsoft has said that 90 percent of businesses plan to make the transition. According to a variety of surveys, XP is still being used by more than half of all business users.

The relative slowness in making the transition has been attributed to the disastrous Windows Vista, which many users hated, and the wait for the coming Windows 8, which Microsoft has started previewing and promoting.

There's also a large contingent that endorses that dictum, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," and are remaining with XP - at least until Microsoft gives a good reason to upgrade. Finally, there are some businesses who are migrating, or considering migrating, to non-Windows platforms, such as Apple or Google's Android or Chrome. The center of gravity in computing has moved to mobile devices, an environment where Windows barely has a presence, while Apple and Google are currently the kings of mobile.

Apple s Slide to Unlock Patent Worries Taiwanese Government

Apple s recent success in patenting the Slide to Unlock gesture used on its iOS devices has the Taiwanese government worried, causing the country s Premier (Prime Minister), Wu Den-yih, to direct a number of government agencies to assess whether Taiwanese companies will be affected by a possible restriction on the gesture.

Focus Taiwan reports that the government issued the request two days after the USPTO granted the world s biggest technology company a patent that covers the unlocking mechanism on iPhone and iPad devices. Since the gesture was incorporated, both Windows Phone and Android devices have been seen to utilise the same mechanism.

The original patent was filed in December 2005, more than a year before the first iPhone was released.

Attending a weekly Cabinet meeting, Wu said that he was concerned about Apple s new patent, particularly how it would affect Taiwanese companies operating in the smartphone and tablet markets. As a result, both the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) and the Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI) have been instructed to help domestic companies (which includes HTC) to deal with possible patent infringement complaints filed by the Cupertino-based company.

Apple is currently embroiled in a number of patent disputes with Samsung and HTC over claims of copying and use of specific software technologies in their Android devices. It is not known whether the company intends to utilise the Slide to Unlock patent against its rivals but the threat

remains.

John McCarthy Dies, Age 84

The news already hit HackerNews late last night, but at that time there
was no confirmation so I decided to wait until we knew for sure. Well,
after Dennis Ritchie and Steve Jobs, the technology world lost another
great mind yesterday. Stanford has confirmed that John McCarthy, the
creator of LISP and the father of artificial intelligence, has passed
away, age 84.

John McCarthy truly was a visionary, coining the term artificial
intelligence way back in 1955, and with the Dartmouth Conference of 1956,
McCarthy established the field of Artificial Intelligence, together with
Marvin Minsky, Claude Shannon, and Nathan Rochester. This wasn't his only
accomplishment, however.

McCarthy also created the LISP programming language, the second oldest
high-level programming language in the word (FORTRAN is the oldest). The
LISP programming language was officially proposed in McCarty's research
paper 'Recursive Functions of Symbolic Expressions and Their Computation
by Machine, Part I', which is available for free online. As part of further
improving LISP, McCarthy also invented garbage collection.

He further contributed to many other aspects of technology, such as
timesharing. While Bob Bemer was the first to propose a time-sharing
mechanism for computers, McCarthy was the first to develop a working
time-sharing system on an IBM 704; the Compatible Time-Sharing System,
grew out of McCarthy's work, and was the precursor to MULTICS, which in
itself was the precursor to UNIX.

As said, he contributed to many more fields within information technology
in a time when the field was just starting to get a solid foothold in the
world of science. I don't know about you, but October 2011 is more and
more starting to look like The Month Computing Died.

The Internet Hasn't Changed Much in 15 Years

You may think that the web has evolved at breakneck speeds over the past
decade and a half, but Jared Newman over at Technologizer has a first-hand
document showing that the early Internet wasn't all that different from
today's. While at his folks' house in Connecticut for the weekend, Newman
came across a high-school handout from 1996 explaining the advantages and
disadvantages of using that newfangled "Internet" everybody was talking
about. So what was the Internet circa 1996 like? Well, at least in terms
of how people used it, it doesn't sound all that different from what we
have in 2011.

Clearly, the reasons people use the Internet haven't changed much since
1996. Access to news, weather, video, pictures, maps, stores, games, and
friends - it's all there listed there under "Advantages." (However, no
one uses chat rooms anymore. The function they served has largely be taken
over by social networks.) Some of the problems plaguing the early Internet
in the "Disadvantages" column are still here today too. Despite the rise of

reputable online journalism outlets, people still rail against the web as
being unreliable. Security is still as much an issue as it ever was. And
the "hours" that Internet addicts spend online? By that loose criteria,
almost everybody would be considered an addict today.

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